

Cardinal Griffin Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124468
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328148
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Richard Masterton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	973
Sixth form	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Mellor
Headteacher	Michaels Burrowes
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Stafford Road Cannock WS11 4AW
Telephone number	01543 502215
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cardinal Griffin is a Catholic Comprehensive School serving the town and surrounding district of Cannock. It has specialist status in science. Approximately 62% of the pupils are from Catholic homes. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or from minority ethnic groups are all below average. The school participates in the Cannock Chase Collegiate consortium of schools to extend curriculum provision, in both the main school and the sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cardinal Griffin Catholic High is a good school that pupils are proud to attend. The school nurtures high standards of behaviour, thoughtfulness and a great enthusiasm for learning. Pupils become responsible members of the community, willing to help others, and able to see situations from a variety of view points. They eat healthily, take exercise regularly and enthusiastically participate in many extra-curricular activities including those that develop awareness of other communities. Music making is strong. Through their talents, such as in music, pupils reach out to meet and entertain others in school, in this country and abroad. Pupils respond thoughtfully to the strong Christian ethos that underpins the work of their school. They welcome visitors and display great courtesy and respect. Pupils' conduct and demeanour are of a consistently high standard.

The good leadership of the headteacher and his staff, together with the outstanding work of the governing body, have significantly improved teaching in the main school and stepped up the pace of learning for pupils. There is a rigorous expectation that lesson planning is detailed, pupils are given plenty of appropriate work, and effective teaching strategies are used. There is a growing capacity among middle managers to develop and implement effective strategies for improvement in their areas of responsibility. This strengthening of middle management and good self-evaluation has contributed to steadily improving standards in the main school. However, self-evaluation is only satisfactory in the sixth form. The sixth form is improving but it is not moving on as well as the main school. This is because there is not careful enough analysis of why provision, particularly teaching, results in pupils doing better in the main school than students do in the sixth form.

The school offers a good curriculum, meeting statutory requirements, and begins pupils' preparation for GCSE courses in core subjects at age 13. The science specialism has broadened options for pupils. Good provision is offered for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and there are appropriate vocational courses offered in conjunction with other local providers. Pupils have many opportunities to work co-operatively together and their own personal commitment helps make lessons very effective. Although teaching and learning are good overall, some lesson planning does not take enough account of the different starting points and abilities of pupils. In these lessons, this results in the pace of learning slowing. It is because teaching is not always closely enough matched to all pupils' needs that teaching is less effective, although satisfactory, in the sixth form. Across the school as a whole, marking of work does not always show how work can be improved. Nevertheless, assessment is well-used to report progress. There are many good examples of the use of assessment to identify pupils who are struggling, leading to the provision of extra support and these pupils subsequently making rapid progress. Care, guidance and support are good, especially in respect of career choices and courses.

Pupils come to the school in Year 7 with average attainment. The most recent statistics show that the progress they make in the main school is good. This improvement in learning is now evident in a steady rising trend in GCSE results where general standards are now well above the national average. Without exception, all groups of pupils succeed and almost everyone leaves school with worthwhile qualifications.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Although standards at A level were below average in 2008, there are signs that standards are improving. This is evident in the most recent AS-level results which were broadly average. Students' progress is currently satisfactory. They have a positive approach to their studies and their attitude to learning is good. The curriculum matches their needs well and this has been a factor in improving progress. The school has responded to a demand for a wide range of A-level courses and the Chase Collegiate is used to help those students who wish to follow a more vocational provision. Guidance and support, particularly towards securing university entrance, is good and students speak highly of the help they have received. A high proportion go on to higher education. Students respond well to high expectations of their conduct and commitment, using their private study time productively. They undertake leadership roles in the school and in local primary schools mentoring younger pupils. They organise charity events and contribute to their community by volunteering as sports leaders.

The leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. It has identified the main areas requiring improvement and satisfactory action has been taken. However, there is not sufficiently rigorous evaluation of the impact of provision, particularly teaching, on students' progress. Although teaching in many lessons is good, overall it is satisfactory. It has not yet challenged all students fully to make the good progress that is now evident in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching is always closely matched to all learners' needs and challenges them fully, particularly in the sixth form.
- Rigorously evaluate the impact of provision, particularly teaching, in the sixth form, and ensure that the pace of improvement in the sixth form is speeded up.
- Make sure that marking always gives learners clear guidance on how they can improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with a wide range of prior attainment but overall, their starting points are average. School assessment data shows that pupils reach expected standards at the end of Year 9. GCSE results have shown a steady rise over a three-year period and the proportion of pupils getting five or more higher GCSE grades is now significantly above average. Those pupils who sat GCSE and vocational subject examinations in 2008 made good progress, especially in their last two years. This increased rate of progress is a direct result of managers' recent work to improve teaching. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well. The school is very successful in ensuring that everyone succeeds. Recent sixth form standards show that progress is satisfactory and the latest AS-level results indicate that improvement is taking place.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are positive about their school. They greatly enjoy their learning, feel safe, and are comfortable about approaching staff. Relationships are good, co-operative and productive. Pupils' good enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. The school has been successful in improving the attendance of the few pupils reluctant to engage with their school.

Younger pupils say that older pupils help and care for them. Pupils willingly and responsibly adopt safe practices such as wearing eye protection for science experiments. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Pupils' conduct and co-operation adds value to the teaching they receive. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respond positively to the opportunities provided for this through the curriculum, trips and overseas visits and not least the Christian teaching and purpose of the school. Pupils' understanding of how to live healthily is good. Healthy eating in the canteen is popular and many pupils take part in voluntary sport activities.

Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community through the school council. They also willingly take on positions of responsibility. Pupils have a well-developed concern for others and demonstrate this in their involvement with charities and local community groups. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives through work experience, work-based learning and the school's strong links with the careers service and other outside agencies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils cooperate willingly with their teachers, become actively engaged in lessons and contribute well. All teachers follow the school lesson-planning framework. As a result, learning objectives are made clear at the start of the lesson and are revisited at the end to check on and reinforce learning. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and lessons use a variety of strategies which keep pupils interested and involved. Pupils enjoy their learning and work well in pairs or small groups, supporting each other in developing their skills. They show pride in their work and make good progress in the main school, building on prior learning.

Although teachers have high expectations of behaviour and pupils' participation, not all teaching takes sufficient account of pupils' different levels of prior learning or different abilities. This is the main reason why teaching is less effective in the sixth form, even though there are examples of good practice there. Teachers make students aware of their current levels or grades and of their targets, which are suitably challenging. Across the school, marking is undertaken regularly. This promotes pupils' commitment and effort but teachers' comments do not always correct any misunderstanding or show them how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum takes good account of pupils' needs and interests. Recent improvements, such as the introduction of vocational courses, have contributed significantly to better progress and standards. The Year 9 curriculum is innovative and allows pupils to commence their GCSE courses in English, mathematics and sciences. Pupils are also able to extend their experience following new subjects such as Chinese or motor vehicle studies. The school offers an extensive range of enrichment activities. During the inspection, for example, some Year 10 students listened to a talk by a visitor from the Royal Navy and some Year 9 students visited a careers convention. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities in sports, drama and music. Large numbers of pupils take part. The school handball team has enjoyed success at national level and the school's swing band has a strong reputation in the local community. Participation in these activities contributes strongly to pupils' maturity and their personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has good systems for regularly monitoring and reviewing pupils' attendance and well-being. Monitoring of academic progress is good, with regular meetings between pupils and their mentors. Pupils have challenging targets although some are not sufficiently personalised. They receive good help and support to try to reach them and pupils know there is always someone to turn to if they need help. However, there are some missed opportunities to help pupils improve their work on a day-by-day basis through marking. Vulnerable pupils receive good support in developing their personal and academic skills.

Pupils feel that their views are valued and that the school management listens to their concerns. A very wide range of effective strategies, including materials from national programmes, is used well to improve and maintain high standards of pupils' behaviour. Child protection arrangements and procedures for health and safety are fully in place. Good information and guidance are given to pupils to help them to make choices when selecting courses for the next stage of their education, including the sixth form, or when transferring to employment. The school has very effective working links and partnerships with other organisations to promote learners' well-being.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers have a clear vision and focus on developing pupils both academically and personally. Staff share this vision and this creates a positive climate for learning and the promotion of many opportunities that develop community cohesion and pupils' good awareness of others. Leadership by the headteacher has inspired a clear focus on raising standards through the setting and monitoring of challenging targets to be achieved through good teaching and learning. Monitoring, both of the work of teachers and the progress of pupils, is rigorous and has led to marked improvements in the main school. However, the checks made on how teaching supports progress in the sixth form have not been undertaken with the same rigour and have been less effective as a result.

Governance is outstanding in supporting the direction of the school. Governors enjoy strong communication with senior leaders. They closely monitor progress and the effectiveness of their policies such as those on equalities and school finance. Robust action, including redundancies, was taken to deal with a budget deficit. The vast majority of parents strongly support the direction of the school. The success of action taken to improve standards and progress shows that capacity to improve is good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Cardinal Griffin Catholic High School, Cannock, WS11 4AW

My colleagues and I greatly enjoyed our visit to your school. It was very interesting to see the work you undertake, to look at the standards you achieve and the quality of the education you receive. It was invaluable for us to meet you as you gave us some of the most important information that we needed for our work. Thank you for your great courtesy and assistance.

You attend a good school. You make good progress in the main school because you are taught well. GCSE standards have risen steadily to above average in recent years. The curriculum is good and the changes the school has made in Year 9 are helping you prepare early for external examinations. You are given good care, guidance and support for your learning and development.

We were greatly impressed by how well you participate in many voluntary activities and contribute to helping others. Your good behaviour and positive attitudes to school mean that you all help each other succeed. There are good features to the sixth form provision but this has not developed as well as that in the main school. As a result, the progress you make in the sixth form is not as good as in the main school, although it is satisfactory.

In our report we ask governors and managers to do these three things to improve the school further:

- ensure that teaching is always closely matched to all your needs and challenges you fully, particularly in the sixth form
- rigorously evaluate the effect that teaching has on your progress in the sixth form and speed up the pace of improvement in the sixth form
- make sure that marking always gives you clear guidance on how you can improve your work.

The Christian ethos in your school means that you have a good relationship with teachers and managers based on trust, mutual respect and care. Please help them to help you by trying as hard as you can and advising them on the success of any measures they use to help you.

Yours sincerely

R Douglas Masterton

Lead inspector